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THE QUARTERLY
of the
Oregon Historical Society

VOLUME XVIII

JUNE, 1917

NUMBER 2

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WHERE IS POINT VANCOUVER?

By T. C. ELLIOTT.

The text for this discussion will be found in "Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean," by Capt. George Vancouver, Quarto Edition, London, 1798, Volume Two, Chapter Three, Page 64, Line 33, et seq., as follows: "Having now passed the sand bank I landed for the purpose of taking our last bearings; a sandy point on the opposite shore bore S. 80 E., distant about two miles; this point terminating our view of the river I named it after Captain Vancouver; it is situated in latitude $45^{\circ} 27'$, longitude $237^{\circ} 50'$."

Captain Vancouver is quoting the language of his lieutenant, Wm. R. Broughton, then in command of "the Armed Tender Chatham," and on detached duty making a survey of the Columbia River, the first survey ever made of the channel of the river above Gray's Bay near Astoria. The date of the record is October 30th, 1792. Lieut. Broughton had left the Chatham at anchor off what is now the Quarantine Station opposite Astoria on the 24th of the same month and had ascended the river with most of the crew in two boats, the pinnace and cutter, making observations and soundings, and bestowing names upon islands and tributary streams; and on the day of this entry he had named the most prominent landmark in all Oregon, MT. HOOD.

The inquiry of the title is pertinent at this time for the fol-

lowing reasons: The completion and popular use by tourists of the Columbia River Highway eastward from Portland and particularly the building of a public resort at Crown Point on that highway serves to bring to the attention of people from all parts of the world the wonderful scenic stretches of the Columbia river both above and below that Point, and it is very fitting that Point Vancouver be generally known as a landmark of historic interest. No recent map, official or commercial, of either Washington or Oregon or of the River, designates such a Point, and no chart of the river issued by the U. S. Government indicates it as such, and most of the steamboat men now using the river have never heard of it and know the place merely as Cottonwood Point. Also histories and historical narratives are being frequently published showing a strange ignorance of the proper location of this Point, confusing it with the site of the former Fort Vancouver of the Hudson's Bay Company and the present city of Vancouver, twenty-five miles down stream. The latest histories of the State of Washington, edited by C. O. Snowden and Edmond S. Meany, contain this error. Point Vancouver has in fact been allowed to become unknown, physically, geographically and historically.

This prevailing ignorance may be attributed primarily to lack of careful research, but incidentally to two other conditions: the minor physical prominence of the Point—low and sandy and submerged during high stages of water—in the immediate vicinity of well-known and prominent landmarks, and the faulty record left by Capt. Vancouver. The latitude and longitude being given, the location of the Point would seem to be very easy of determination, but unfortunately the recorded latitude would place it in the tall timber of Clackamas County, about nine miles south of the Columbia river. The longitude also is too far East, and nearer correct as to a promontory five or six miles to the northeastward. Capt. George Vancouver was one of England's noted navigators and his work of discovery was of great value, especially that in the

waters bordering upon Vancouver's Island, B. C., and in our own so-called Puget's Sound, and his name is rightly honored. But his death occurred while the manuscript of the original edition of his "Voyage of Discovery" was being prepared for publication, and the completion of that work fell to his brother. In that way errors crept into the published charts and narrative, and in a second edition of six volumes the brother corrected some of these errors; but those relating to Point Vancouver were probably due to Mr. Broughton's instruments.

Mr. J. B. Tyrrell, of Toronto, a civil engineer of wide experience, suggests to the writer that sextants and quadrants in use in 1792 often had instrumental errors of a minute or two, and that the chronometer used by Mr. Broughton could not have been adjusted since the expedition left England. Also "with regard to his survey up the river from the point where he left the 'Chatham' the two longitudes given are respectively at $236^{\circ} 17\frac{1}{2}'$ (the Chatham) and $237^{\circ} 50'$ (Point Vancouver), or a difference of $1^{\circ} 32\frac{1}{2}'$. The actual difference in longitude as shown on the charts and maps in my possession is, as far as I can measure it, exactly this amount, and you will agree with me that in ascending a river where the directions had all to be taken with the compass and the distances had to be estimated such result shows marvelously accurate work. On the whole, I would consider Broughton's survey, considering the time spent on it and the means at his disposal, such a survey as the best surveyors might be proud of."

It would be of interest in this connection to reproduce in series the various maps indicating the Columbia river prior to its actual discovery and when it was known merely as the "River of the West or the Oregon"; for instance, the map published in 1778 by Jonathan Carver in his "Travels," etc. Upon such maps the course of the river was naturally only a guess. The survey of Lieut. Broughton in 1792 made possible the first scientific chart ever drawn showing the actual course of the river inland for a distance of more than one

hundred miles and a map drawn from that chart is reproduced herewith, taken from those in the original edition of Vancouver's "Voyage of Discovery."

The white men who next visited this part of the Columbia river came to it from the interior, the members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1805-6. Captain William Clark was the engineer of that party and the maps drawn by him are remarkably accurate. These are contained in the Thwaites' Edition of Lewis and Clark, published in 1904-5 by Dodd-Mead & Company. The river was at practically the same stage of water as in 1792, and it is not probable that many changes took place in the channel and shore line between 1792 and 1805-6, considering the few during the hundred years since that date. Lewis and Clark made no mention of Point Vancouver in their journals or maps.

The next record of the course of the Columbia river was that made by the famous astronomer and geographer of the Canadian "North-West Company," Mr. David Thompson, in 1811, and shown on the wonderful map drawn by him in the years 1813-14, and printed in his "Narrative" recently published by the Champlain Society of Toronto, Canada. David Thompson's visit was in the summer during a period of extremely high water; Celilo Falls were entirely submerged that year. He was conversant with the survey of Lieut. Broughton, for his journal entry of Saturday, July 13th, 1811, written when camped just above Rooster Rock, reads: "Camped at 8:5 P. M. a little above Point Vancouver." And when returning up the river on Thursday, Jul. 25th, in company with David Stuart, Alex. Ross and others of the Pacific Fur Company, he records: "middle of course turned N. E. $\frac{1}{2}$ m. to a good campment at 7 P. M., fine meadow land below Point Vancouver." The fine meadows were at Washougal, Washington; Mr. Thompson recorded the latitude and longitude of this encampment, but his map was too comprehensive to include mention of Point Vancouver.

The next map of the Columbia river which may possibly

be called scientific was that of Lieutenant Charles Wilkes, Commander of the U. S. Exploring Expedition in 1841, and covered the course of the river from Cape Disappointment inland as far as the mouth of the Yakima river. Commander Wilkes was a guest for some time at Fort Vancouver, and doubtless drew much information from the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company; and his subordinate, Lieutenant Drayton, ascended the Columbia in company with Chief Factor Peter Skene Ogden as far as Fort Walla Walla. Mr. Wilkes' map places Point Vancouver a little below Cape Horn, the most prominent landmark on the north side of the river in that vicinity. The officers of the Hudson's Bay Company infrequently mention Point Vancouver in the journals of their travels up and down the Columbia river, and they knew and assigned its proper location. Presumably Mr. Wilkes drew his map from Mr. Drayton's report as to the most prominent point of land in the vicinity and the longitude of Vancouver's chart.

Necessary to this discussion is an intelligent knowledge of Lieut. Broughton's movements on Oct. 30th, 1792, and that part of Capt. Vancouver's narrative will now be reproduced verbatim. The night of Oct. 29th-30th was spent by his party on the Oregon shore opposite the lower end of Government island. On the morning of the 30th they returned a mile down stream, crossed the river and proceeded along the north shore:

Oct. 29th. "At the several creek and branches they had passed they lost successively most of their Indian companions, excepting one elderly chief, who, in the most civil and friendly manner had accompanied them from the first, and had a village still further up the river. Having received many presents, he had become much attached to the party, and, to manifest his gratitude, he now went forward to provide them with lodgings, and whatever acceptable refreshments his village might afford. About seven in the evening he reached his habitation, where he much wished them to

remain; but preferring a more secluded resting place, they resorted to a shallow creek a mile further up the river, and about eight miles from Belle Vue Point, where they passed the night. Here it was low water about two, and high water at half past five o'clock the next morning. Oct. 30th. At seven they again departed, but were obliged to retire some distance to clear a shoal spit that lies off this creek; after this they proceeded to the northern shore. This shore was well wooded, composed of stony beaches, and the soundings were regular from 2 to 7 fathoms. The southern shore, though low and sandy, was also well clothed with wood; the breadth of the river was about a quarter of a mile, and its direction was the same as before mentioned.

The wind blew fresh from the eastward, which, with the stream against them, rendered their journey very slow and tedious. They passed a small rocky opening¹ that had a rock in its center, about twelve feet above the surface of the water; on this were lodged several large trees that must have been left there by an unusually high tide. From hence a large river bore S. 5 E., which was afterwards seen to take a south-westwardly direction, and was named BARING'S RIVER²; between it and the shoal creek is another opening³; and here that in which they had rested stretched to the E. N. E., and had several small rocks in it. Into this creek⁴ the friendly old chief who had attended them went to procure some salmon, and they pursued their way against the stream, which had now become so rapid that they were able to make but little progress. At half past two they stopped on the northern shore⁵ to dine, opposite to the entrance of Baring's river. Ten canoes with the natives now attended them, and their friendly old chief soon returned and brought them an abundance of very fine salmon. He had gone through a rocky passage, and had

¹ Now known as Camas Slough but really the river channel behind Lady's Island.

² The Sandy River, called by Lewis and Clark the Quick Sand River.

³ The river channel on south side of Government Island; for some reason Mr. Broughton did not recognize this as an island.

⁴ Camas Slough.

⁵ The party dined on the south side of Lady's Island opposite to the lower or false mouth of Sandy River.

returned above the party, making the land on which they were at dinner an island. This was afterwards found to be about three miles long, and after the lieutenant of the *Chatham*, was named JOHNSTONE'S ISLAND.⁶ The west point of Baring's river is situated in latitude $45^{\circ} 28'$, longitude $237^{\circ} 41'7''$; from whence the main branch takes rather an irregular course, about N. 82 E.; it is near a half a mile wide, and in crossing it the depth was from 6 to 3 fathoms. The southern shore is low and woody, and contracts the river by means of a low sandy flat that extends from it, on which were lodged several large dead trees. The best passage is close to Johnstone's island; this has a rocky bold shore, but Mr. Broughton pursued the channel on the opposite side, where he met with some scattered rocks; these, however, admitted of good passage between them and the main land; along which he continued until towards evening, making little progress against the stream. "Having now passed the sand bank," says Mr. Broughton, "I landed⁸ for the purpose of taking our last bearings; a sandy point on the opposite shore bore S. 80 E., distant about two miles; this point terminating our view of the river, I named it after Captain Vancouver; it is situated in latitude $45^{\circ} 27'$, longitude $237^{\circ} 50'9''$."

The same remarkable mountain¹⁰ that had been seen from Belle Vue point again presented itself, bearing at this station s. 67 E.; and though the party were now nearer to it by 7 leagues, yet its lofty summit was scarcely more distinct across the intervening land, which was more than moderately elevated. Mr. Broughton honored it with Lord Hood's name; its appearance was magnificent; and it was clothed in snow from its summit, as low down as the high land, by which it was intercepted, rendered it visible. Mr. Broughton lamented

⁶ Now Lady's Island, opposite Camas, Washington, called by Lewis and Clark Brant Island; Johnstone Straits in British Columbia waters was named in honor of this same Lieutenant Johnstone.

⁷ Corrected observation would read about Lat. $45^{\circ} 34'$ and Long. $237^{\circ} 36'$.

⁸ This station was on the Oregon shore and seems to have been just above the mouth of the upper or true mouth of the Sandy River.

⁹ Corrected location would be nearly at Lat. $45^{\circ} 33'$ and Long. $237^{\circ} 42'$.

¹⁰ Mount Hood.

that he could not acquire sufficient authority to ascertain its positive situation, but imagined it could not be less than 20 leagues from their then station.

Round Point Vancouver the river seemed to take a more northerly direction; its southern shores became very hilly, with bare spots of a reddish colour on the sides of the hills, and their tops were thinly covered with pine trees. The opposite shore was low, well wooded, and mostly composed of shingly beaches. The breadth of the river here was a quarter of a mile; it afforded a clear good channel on the northern shore, with soundings across from 6 to 2 fathoms, shoaling gradually to the bed of sand that stretches from the opposite side. During this day they had constantly rowed against the stream, having increased their distance only 12 miles up the river; and notwithstanding there had been a sensible regular rise and fall to the water, it had not in the least degree affected the stream, which had run constantly down with great rapidity.

Mr. Broughton at this time calculated the distance, from what he considered the entrance of the river, to be 84, and from the Chatham, 100 miles. To reach this station had now occupied their time, with very hard labour, seven days; this was to the full extent for which their provisions had been furnished; and their remaining supplies could not with all possible frugality last more than two or three days longer. And as it was impossible under the most favorable circumstances, they should reach the vessels in a less space of time, Mr. Broughton gave up the idea of any further examination, and was reconciled to this measure, because even thus far the river could hardly be considered as navigable for shipping. Previously to his departure, however, he formally took possession of the river, and the country in its vicinity, in His Britannic Majesty's name, having every reason to believe that the subjects of no other civilized nation or state had ever entered this river before; in this opinion he was confirmed by Mr. Gray's

sketch, in which it does not appear that Mr. Gray either saw, or was ever within 5 leagues of, its entrance.¹¹

"The friendly old chief, who still remained of their party, assisted at the ceremony, and drank His Majesty's health on the occasion; from him they endeavored to acquire some further information of the country. The little that could be understood was that higher up the river they would be prevented passing by falls. This was explained, by taking up water in his hands, and imitating the manner of its falling from rocks, pointing at the same time to the place where the sun rises; indicating that its source in that direction would be found at a great distance.

"By the time these ceremonies and inquiries were finished, the night had closed in; notwithstanding this, Mr. Broughton re-embarked, and with the stream in his favor sat out on his return. All the Indians now very civilly took their leave, excepting the old chief and his people, who, their route being the same way, still bore them company. Little opportunity had been afforded, especially at the latter part of their journey up the river, to ascertain the depth of the channels; to supply this deficiency, the two boats spread, and sounded regularly all the way down. By this means a bank was found extending entirely across Baring's river, and from thence across the main branch, which they had navigated, to the rocky passage at the west end of Johnstone's island; the greatest depth having been only 3 fathoms, Mr. Broughton was confirmed in the opinion he had previously formed, that any further examination of this branch would be useless.

"After passing to the west of the rocky passage, the best channel is on the southern shore, but even that is intricate, and the greatest depth of its water is only 4 fathoms. They took up their abode for the night about half a mile from their preceding night's lodging; having returned in three hours the same distance that had taken them twelve hours to ascend."

¹¹ Lieut. Broughton and Capt. Vancouver argue that the mouth of the Columbia river was at Tenas-Illiche Island, between Cathlamet Point and Skamokawa; and that all the wide stretches of river below that constituted a bay or estuary.

It will be conceded that Point Vancouver can be best located from a station on the bank or shore of the Columbia river in relatively the same spot that Lieutenant Broughton stood upon, and by taking the same observations that he took. Recognizing that fact, the writer, in company with Mr. George H. Himes and Mr. Leslie M. Scott, of the Oregon Historical Society, and Mr. E. O. S. Scholefield, Archivist of the Province of B. C., on October 30th, 1916 (an anniversary date), took a launch at Camas, Wash., and carefully followed the track of Lieut. Broughton on the river, lunched about where he dined, and afterward stood upon the extensive bar of sand on the Oregon shore between the false mouth and the upper, or true mouth, of the Sandy river and checked the narrative of Capt. Vancouver (from Broughton's report, of course) with the physical appearance of the opposite shore and surrounding country. An observation of Mt. Hood was impossible on that day, but steamboat men have repeatedly assured the writer that Mt. Hood is not visible from the river levels at any point much above the true mouth of the Sandy river. It at once became conclusive that Point Vancouver is that low and quite broad point of land situated southeast from Washougal and southwest from Cape Horn, Washington, and nearly opposite to the railway station of Corbett, Oregon; forming the extreme southern end of the extensive meadows stretching southeastward from Washougal and around which the river flows from Mt. Pleasant to Washougal. This point in 1792 was probably composed entirely of sand, but is now overgrown with cottonwood trees and brush and a sand island in front of it is also covered with brush. From this physical condition it has come to be known by the river-men as Cottonwood Point. It is quite possible that in October, 1792, the sandy island was joined to the shore line and formed the point, or made it appear more like a point than observation from other stations, such as Crown Point, now indicates.

Is it not possible that official cognizance of this landmark may soon be taken and Point Vancouver be designated on the maps and charts issued by the national government?